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ABSTRACT

The nature and origins of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education are discussed. Emphasis is placed on origin; membership; relationship to Carnegie Corporation and to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching; relationship to higher education and government; the commission's legitimacy; schedule and activities; and achievements, shortcomings, and impact. (MJM)

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CARNEGIE COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION

The Nature and Origins of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education

by ALAN PIFER

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THE NATURE AND ORIGINS OF THE CARNEGIE COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION

By Alan Pifer, *President*
The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

Based on a Speech Delivered to the
Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and Universities
October 16, 1972

I must tell you how gratified I am that the Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and Universities not only devoted its annual meeting last year to the work of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education but is doing so again today. Now perhaps this is no more than just a proper show of state pride that six of the Commission members, including the chairman, are native sons and daughters of Pennsylvania. However, I choose to think your discussions are taking place because of keen interest in the Commission's findings, and that this in turn is a form of praise for its work. If it is, and if I may be both candid and immodest, it is praise that is entirely warranted. Clark Kerr and his associates on the Commission, and its staff, have, in my view, done a superb job.

I am not going to talk today about the Carnegie Commission's recommendations. Rather, I am going to discuss and try to assess for you the nature of the Commission; its origins, its membership; its relationship to the two Carnegie foundations, to the higher educational community, and to government; its legitimacy; its schedule and activities; its achievements and shortcomings; and, finally, its impact.

Origins

In 1905 The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching was established for the specific purpose of providing free pensions for college teachers and their widows. This was six years before the founding of Carnegie Corporation of New York, the largest and most general of the trusts, institutes, and foundations created by Andrew Carnegie. The charter of the Foundation included a much broader general purpose as well. This was "to do and perform all things necessary to encourage, uphold and dignify the profession of the teacher and the cause of higher education in the United States. . . ." Henry Prichett, the highly able first president of the Foundation, wrote perceptively to Mr. Carnegie shortly after the founding:

". . . the more I have seen of the work the more clearly I understand that the Foundation is to become one of the great educational influences in our country, because it is going to deal, necessarily, not alone with the payment of retirement pensions to deserving teachers, but as well with the most far-reaching educational questions, and with the most important problems of educational policy. . . ."

For a number of years studies supported by the Foundation had the kind of influence that Prichett foresaw, but by 1966 the Foundation was at a low ebb and faced an uncertain future. Its pension mission was virtually fulfilled, and its future income, beyond that required for pensions, would be tied up for years to come in the repayment of some huge debts acquired at an earlier period to meet pension obligations. It had no current program of any great consequence and almost no staff of its own. There was reason to believe that the time might have come to merge the Foundation into Carnegie Corporation.

Nevertheless, after careful thought by the boards of the two foundations and their joint officers, that idea was rejected, essentially on the grounds that a foundation exclusively devoted to the welfare of higher education was sufficiently unusual in our national life to be worth preserving – provided it had sufficient free funds to accomplish something important.

The Corporation, therefore, agreed to give special consideration to a proposal from the Foundation's trustees for support of some major project or study in the field of higher education, and if this rated well in the general competition for the Corporation's grants, to fund it. The Foundation's 25 trustees, almost all of whom were college and university presidents, then came up with the idea of a study of the financing of higher education. Previous studies of this subject, they agreed, were totally out of date and a new one was much needed.

The decision to undertake the study was made at the Foundation's annual meeting on November 16, 1966, and was approved in principle, with initial funding, by the Corporation's trustees on January 19, 1967. Between those dates, specifically on December 21 – and the date is important in view of subsequent events – Clark Kerr, who was then president of the University of California, accepted the invitation to be chairman of the special commission that was to make the study. The appointment was to be of a public service nature, part-time and unpaid.

In that initial discussion we had with Mr. Kerr, he made the telling point that he could see no way to study the financing of higher education without looking more broadly at its structure and functions. We agreed, and the project was then designated the Carnegie Commission to Study the Future Structure, Functions, and Financing of Higher Education, soon shortened to

the Carnegie Commission on the Future of Higher Education, and not long thereafter to the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education – informally, "the Kerr Commission."

Immediately after our talk with Clark Kerr, he set off for a quick visit to Hong Kong and Vietnam. Returning to San Francisco January 7, he was interviewed by the press regarding rumors that he would resign from the California presidency over Governor Ronald Reagan's proposal to impose tuition charges upon California residents attending the university. Mr. Kerr disclaimed any intention of resigning and also denied that he was looking for another job. He simply noted that he had been "talking with The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching about giving some of his time to head up a survey of American universities," as he put it.

On January 20, Mr. Kerr, rather unexpectedly, was dismissed from the university presidency by the California Regents, giving him an opportunity to make his famous quip – that he entered the presidency fired with enthusiasm and left the same way! This event, however, caused the Foundation to announce the establishment of its Commission quite a bit sooner than had been planned. In making the announcement on January 24, I was able to say, and say with conviction, on behalf of the trustees and officers, "Since Mr. Kerr was invited to chair the Carnegie Commission nothing has happened to change our view that no man is better qualified than he to head a study of higher education's future in this country."

We asked him to be chairman of the Commission, as the timing of events shows, well before his dismissal by the Regents because we believed he was the best person for this role – perhaps the only person in the country who could really bring it off. His abrupt firing did, however, make it possible for him to

accept on a virtually full-time basis the combined positions of chairman and executive director, and for this we will always be grateful to Governor Reagan!

Membership

Although announcement of the Commission took place earlier than expected, a list of 14 potential members of it had been drawn up and these individuals were approached in good time so that their names could be included in the announcement. They were selected for their known ability, experience, judgment, objectivity, and interest in higher education. Six of the members were trustees of the Foundation as well as being college or university presidents, one was the head of a junior college district, one was a professor, one was the head of a research institute, one was a former governor of this state, one was a publisher, and three were industrialists who were also university or college trustees.

We realized, of course, that there were omissions, but we were adamant that the Commission's independence should not in any way be compromised by the addition of individuals who would feel obliged to represent constituency positions. In time, however, the Commission itself began to feel the need for additional experience in its deliberations; five other persons were added – the deans of two predominantly black law schools, the president of a four-year state college, a professor of psychology on a medical school faculty, and a British authority on international higher education. Meanwhile, one member had resigned for health reasons, making a final membership of 19, including the chairman.

From time to time since then, the work of the Commission has come under attack from certain critics because of the nature of its membership. Being careful to identify as many Com-

mission members as possible only by their so-called "corporate links," they have charged that anything coming out of the Commission is bound to be tainted with a big business point of view.

There are, in fact, just four Commission members, out of a total membership of 19, with business backgrounds. One of these, Norton Simon, was, and still is, a regent of the University of California; a second, Clifton Phalen, was chairman, and is still a member, of the board of trustees of the State University of New York; a third, Ralph Besse, was chairman of the Cleveland Coordinating Council for Higher Education, has been a member of a number of national and state bodies concerned with community colleges and with vocational education and is presently the chairman of the board of trustees of Case Western Reserve University; a fourth, William Scranton, while governor of Pennsylvania, showed a keen interest in the development of higher education, has been a trustee of three private universities, and was chairman of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest.

These four members were selected not as representatives of business, or of anything else, but because, as I have indicated, they had special experience in the governance of higher education and a demonstrated broad interest in the field generally. Their contribution to the Commission's work has, as we expected, been substantial and one that has been greatly appreciated and respected by their fellow members.

It is, of course, the work of the Commission as a whole, rather than the characteristics of individual members, that should be the basis of any fair and reasonable judgments about it. The essential test is whether the product is proving to be helpful to the nation in the exceedingly complex task of illuminating future paths for higher education.

Relationship to Carnegie Corporation and to The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

Carnegie Corporation has, since 1967, made annual grants to The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to meet most of the Commission's expenses. Since these grants now total five and two-thirds million dollars, the Corporation's role has not been negligible, although it has been indirect. The Foundation, however, sponsors the Commission. In a technical, administrative sense, the Commission is, in fact, an integral part of the Foundation. Staff members of the Commission are the Foundation's employees and the Commission's headquarters at Berkeley, California, is its West Coast office.

Yet it is also clear that the Commission was created as an independent entity, reporting not to the Foundation but to the American people. Although its operations are subject to an annual budgetary review by the Foundation, the Commission's findings are developed independently and are not subject to clearance or approval by the Foundation's or the Corporation's trustees or officers. Each Commission report carries an inscription on the flyleaf which reads:

> "The views and conclusions expressed in this report are solely those of the members of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of Carnegie Corporation of New York, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, or their trustees, officers, directors, or employees."

Relationship to Higher Education and Government

It should be evident that the Commission does not in any respect "represent" higher education, including its associations,

its institutions, or its estates – that is, trustees, administrators, faculty, students, and alumni. Its mission is to speak to the nation *about* the vast enterprise of higher education, not *for* it. In no sense is it an advocate for the higher educational community, nor is it beholden to this community or answerable to it, except, of course, for the factual accuracy of the data and statements it publishes.

Just as the Commission stands in an independent position in relation to higher education, so it stands with government, both federal and state. It is a totally private activity, privately financed and privately controlled; no public official has influenced its deliberations or its findings.

The Commission, as legally an activity of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, is, of course, subject to the regulations of the Tax Reform Act of 1969. The Act has a general prohibition against foundations' lobbying or attempting to influence the opinion of the public or of officials in a legislative matter. But in the definition of what constitutes "influencing," the Act specifically exempts "making available the results of nonpartisan analysis, study, or research." It also permits foundations to provide "technical advice or assistance to a governmental body or to a committee or other subdivision thereof in response to a written request by such body or subdivision."

The Commission's reports *have* been made widely available to appropriate officials, and the Commission, sometimes as a body and sometimes through its chairman, has responded to formal requests by both elected and appointed officials to consult with them, give evidence at hearings, provide data, and offer opinions.

The Commission's Legitimacy

Although there are some people who approve of the Commission but feel it may on occasion have been too influential with government, there are others who question its legitimacy. By what right, they ask, does a foundation, accountable only to its own board of trustees, set up a private commission to study an activity of great national importance and make public pronouncements about it that may influence the development of public policy?

The work of the Commission is not the first large-scale public inquiry initiated by one or the other of the two Carnegie foundations. At a much earlier period, the Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching organized the study by Abraham Flexner that led to the reform and modernization of medical education. Later, the Corporation commissioned the Myrdal study of the American Negro that was quite influential in the ultimate rejection of the "separate but equal" doctrine in the education of blacks. About a dozen years ago it established the Ashby Commission on postsecondary education in Nigeria, and more recently, the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television.

The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education has, however, been the most comprehensive enterprise of this kind that either of the two foundations has ever launched, and we were bound to wonder if our right to establish it would be questioned.

In one sense, the Commission's legitimacy is not a valid issue. It has no power to act on its own; it can only, through the quality of its work, inform, enlighten, and persuade those who do have the power to act. The legitimacy of such activity is firmly rooted in the constitutional right to freedom of speech.

Beyond that, it is appropriate to note that the accountability of foundations is not just to their boards of trustees. Ultimately, because they are bodies established to operate in the public interest, they must answer to the public at large. They have an obligation to inform the public fully about what they are doing, to do their work competently, and to make their decisions with integrity and objectivity. Being private institutions, however, they are not obligated any more than a private college, voluntary hospital, or private welfare agency to submit their decisions to public authority for approval.

If the activities that foundations support ultimately affect public policy, this will be the result of their successful competition in the marketplace of ideas. The public, in other words, has a completely effective mechanism for control simply in accepting or not accepting the products of private endeavor. Thus, the public will either find what the Commission has to say helpful and convincing, or it will not. And if it does not, no matter what the length of its shelf of publications, it will have no influence whatsoever.

This, again, is one of the features of an open society such as ours. No voice has automatic authority, no words are guaranteed gospel; there will always be a multiplicity of voices and competition among them to be heard. There are, of course, many other voices besides that of the Commission speaking about higher education. Some of these agree with the Commission, some disagree; and this is as it should be.

Schedule and Activities

Once the full scope of the Commission's task had been determined, it became obvious that it would need at least five years to complete its work. As it turns out, the time needed will be

six years and perhaps a bit more. The Commission is presently scheduled to publish its final report in the fall of 1973.

By that time it will have held 24 two- or three-day meetings in 22 different cities in all parts of the country. It will have issued in its own name more than 20 substantial interim reports and a final report. It will have published some 60 commissioned research reports and a half-dozen technical reports, many of these of book length. The chairman will have held at least a dozen press conferences, appeared on television several times, and spoken at countless meetings, as will have other Commissions and staff members. All in all, the sheer volume of work accomplished by the Commission, when completed about a year from now, will be staggering.

Achievements, Shortcomings and Impact

It it far too early to attempt anything like a comprehensive evaluation of the Commission. Some of its most important reports, including the final report, are still to come, and even thereafter it will be some time before the Commission's ultimate impact becomes clear. Any effort at assessment now can therefore be only impressionistic. It must also in my case obviously be subject to some bias on the favorable side. But with those caveats, I do have some preliminary views I might share with you.

The most remarkable thing about the Commission, to me, has been its capacity to take under review the entire, vast, diffuse enterprise of American higher education in virtually all of its multifold aspects – aspects as varied as functions, structure, governance, relationship to other institutions and levels of education, demand and access, expenditure, effective use of resources, technology, and reform. Conceptually, this has been a remarkable feat. The Commission has described and analyzed

higher education as this has never been done before and in the process has contributed enormously to the literature on this subject.

I have also been impressed by the general temper of the Commission's work, which, it seems to me, has been dispassionate, objective, fair-minded, factually based, and imbued with a sense of pragmatic realism. Carrying out its study in a period when higher education itself has been in a state of turmoil and the object of more public concern than ever before in its history, the Commission might easily have joined the chorus of emotional critics or die-hard defenders of the academic enterprise. But it has resisted these temptations.

I have also been pleased by the wide press coverage many of the Commission's reports have received and by evidence that they are being carefully studied by public officials concerned with higher education, by college and university trustees, by presidents and by other administrative officers. Little evidence has come to my attention that faculty members or students are reading the reports or have much interest in them, but I hope I am wrong about this.

A problem we did not foresee when we set up the Commission was the degree to which it would quickly become subject to enormous pressures, both at the state and federal levels, to provide data, offer counsel, and generally be an expert witness in regard to current problems and discussions affecting higher education. These requests have been well motivated and it has seemed in the public interest to meet them. Nevertheless, the Commission has had its own agenda and could not allow itself to become too much diverted from this. It is my impression that Clark Kerr and his colleagues have achieved a skillful balance between responding to immediate demands and stick-

ing to the Commission's main objective of taking a long-range look at higher education's problems and potential.

I have alluded to some of the criticisms that have been directed at the Commission. One of these, that it reflects a big business point of view, has been answered. Another, that it has at times been too influential in the formulation of public policy is, I believe, based on the false premise that it should not be influential. If the influence of a body of this kind derives from the persuasiveness of its product, as it does here, there is nothing improper in being influential. On the contrary, it should be influential.

A third criticism is that the Commission has been too much wedded to the status quo in its reports. A careful reading of these reports, especially *Less Time, More Options* and the reports on medical education, on campus reform, and on instructional technology will, I believe, refute this charge. It must be said, however, that the very calmness and coolness of the Commission's style has, perhaps, made it appear to some observers to be more of a defender of the status quo of conventional approaches than it is. And it is certainly true if "conservative" means recognizing that, whatever its faults, there is much that is good about higher education as we have developed it in this country, and recognizing also that many hundreds of thousands of faculty members, administrators and trustees involved in it are doing their very best to provide quality education at the lowest possible cost to taxpayers, parents, and students.

A more substantial question, I would say, is whether the Commission has fully come to grips with one of the most difficult and most central issues in higher education today, namely its content – particularly the content of undergraduate education, and, within that, what many regard as the "disaster

area" of liberal education. It is true that some of the research studies sponsored by the Commission deal with the subject of liberal education. These include the superb commentaries by two foreign observers Sir Eric Ashby and Joseph Ben-David, and a forthcoming book entitled *Curriculum and Context: Essays on College Education*, edited by Carl Kaysen. It is also true that the Commission's own report, *Reform on Campus: Changing Students, Changing Academic Programs*, has a few excellent pages on the subject. Nonetheless, I think it is fair to say that the Commission has not really met the question head-on and explored it thoroughly – for good reasons, I realize, although I remain somewhat wistful that it has not done so.

Lastly, there is the question of the Commission's impact. Some of the Commission's recommendations have already been widely influential and have clearly affected the development of both public and private policies. Other recommendations have provoked extensive discussion and debate. The research by specialists and observers that the Commission has sponsored, and the work of its own chairman and staff have unquestionably increased the available knowledge about higher education substantially. Impact of this kind will be even greater before the Commission concludes its work.

Speaking for the two Carnegie foundations, I believe this is about all the impact we would want the Commission to have. Its objective was never one of devising and then gaining acceptance for some huge master plan for higher education. Its mission, rather, is to be found in the words of Carnegie Corporation's charter itself, "the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding." We believe the Commission is achieving that purpose and we trust that higher education will, as a result, be stronger and better able to serve the nation's needs.

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